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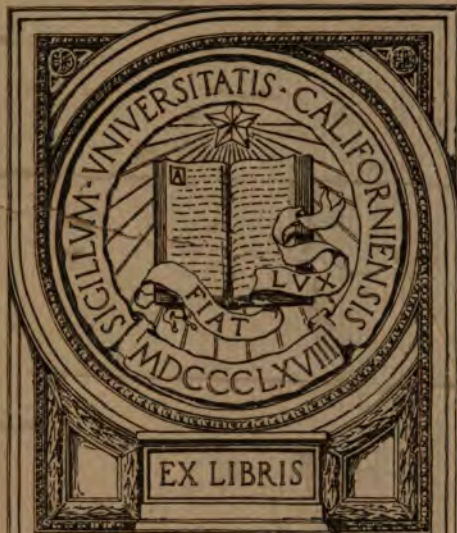
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# NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

## *Elijah and Elisha*

And their part in the politico-religious crisis  
in Israel in the ninth century B. C. . . . .



## *Thesis for the Doctorate*

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

By

LINDSAY B. LONGACRE

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## Elijah and Elisha

The 9th century B. C. falls between two significant periods in the history of Israel. In the century preceding, under Saul, David, and Solomon, the national life had crystalized into a kingdom which not only was established, but was expanded to an extent, and exalted to a magnificence which it never surpassed. In the century following the ninth, the appearance of Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah, marks the definite emergence of a factor in the national life, viz, that of the prophets, which is now seen to have been not only more vital but also more enduring, than that of the kings and of the kingdom. Between these two centuries, each of such exceptional significance, the ninth seems, at first, insignificant by comparison. Many of its years are given over to civil wars, ensuing upon the revolt of the main body of the people from the Davidic dynasty. Foreign wars also occur frequently and are carried on with varied fortune. In one respect, however, this century is conspicuous. It witnesses the begining of a movement whose place in the religious history of Isarel, is of the utmost importance. This movement is based upon the principle that worship of any other

# THE DIVINE NAME

God than JHVH<sup>1</sup> was disloyalty to JHVH. This idea was by no means taken for granted by a people accustomed from time immemorial, to the recognition and worship of more gods than one. The ninth century was the period in which this issue was definitely raised, and launched on a course which led eventually to the enduring monotheism of the later prophets. This achievement was especially the work of prophets and this century can show no more splendid name than that of the prophet Elijah. Associated with him, and equal in importance, is the less prominent Elisha. The present study is concerned with the character and work of these two men, especially with reference to the religious crisis which characterizes this century of Hebrew history.

<sup>1</sup>This symbol of the divine name is used in this study, as the most satisfactory reproduction of the Hebrew record and usage. The four English letters correspond to the four Hebrew letters of the Hebrew word. As these letters stand, they cannot be pronounced because no vowels appear. In the Hebrew, the word cannot be pronounced for the same reason. Wherever this Name occurs in the Hebrew text, a different word is always pronounced, viz: ADONAI, the Lord; the Hebrew consonants, when pointed, always being pointed with the vowels of the word ADONAI. In 1518 A. D., Petrus Galatinus, Confessor of Leo X, proposed to read these vowels and consonants as though they belonged to each other. From this contrivance arose the word, JEHOVAH; but this is no more a real word than the result one might obtain by combining the consonants of the word GERMANY with the vowels of the word PORTUGAL, viz: GORMUNA, which is no word at all. The reverent reluctance to pronounce the divine name is of such an early date that the correct pronunciation has long been forgotten. There are good reasons for supposing that JAHVEH approaches the truth, and this pronunciation has found wide acceptance; but the reasons are not final, and the original pronunciation will probably never be recovered. Cf. Moore: Notes on the name יהוה; Amer. Jour. Theol. Jan. 1908.

## I.

### a. THE RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND.

The western mind finds it difficult to appreciate the religious feeling of the oriental. Eastern life is dominated by religious considerations to an extent practically incredible to an American. A fundamental element in an estimate of any period of Oriental life is the recognition of the place held by religious motives and interests. The modern textual, literary, and historical study of the O. T. has done much to explain some of the phenomena of the writings themselves; but such considerations can never supply all the elements necessary for a reconstruction of the history. Psychologically the Oriental stands on a different eminence from the Westerner, and between the two there is a great gulf fixed, which must at least be recognized, if not bridged, before the one can approach an adequate understanding of the other.

The religion of JHVH did not begin with the work of Elijah and Elisha; they neither invented nor discovered the deity they served. Their religion was that of their compatriots, and their God was JHVH. The monotheism of a later day, however, is by no means to be assumed. JHVH was still but one God among many. The first chapter of Judges shows that the Hebrews settled among the Canaanites instead of driving them out; and it was inevitable that Canaanite worship should exert a strong influence upon the invaders.<sup>2</sup> Such an influence could do no violence to the national conscience, (1) because of the universal belief in many gods, whose worship was not considered mutually exclusive;<sup>3</sup> and (2) because of the common association of

<sup>2</sup>cf. Budde: Religion of Israel to the Exile; Lect. II.

<sup>3</sup>1 Sam. 8:8; 11 Ki. 17:24-33; Hos. 2:5; Ezk. 20 passim.

a deity with a particular locality.<sup>4</sup> Although under David a habitation for JHVH had been established at Jerusalem, and although JHVH was undoubtedly the God of the Hebrews, there is no indication in the narratives of this period that there had ever been any formal and definite question raised as to the impropriety of worshipping other gods, where their worship was customary. Even Solomon's provision for the worship of his foreign wives does not seem to have been a forsaking of JHVH. He did not worship JHVH less because he consented to this other worship. His act is condemned only from a later point of view. It was not until the days of Ahab, as far as the record goes, that the definite issue was raised of worshipping JHVH exclusively.

But all this did not make JHVH any less the God of Israel. In the days of Elijah and Elisha he was worshipped by all, not at one shrine but at many shrines. He was the God who had brought the people out of Egypt<sup>5</sup> It was he whose temple had been built at Jerusalem, confirming the establishment of his worship and of his worshippers in Canaan. The two early documents of the Hexateuch, J. and E., bear undoubted testimony to the national devotion to JHVH in this period. The evening offering (cf 1 K. 18,<sup>20</sup>) as witnessed in the narrative under review, was at this time a well established custom. So absolutely was JHVH accepted as the God of the nation, that Jeroboam who led the great revolt felt his tenure insecure until he had provided shrines for JHVH worship within the bounds of the northern kingdom.

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<sup>4</sup> Sam. 26:9; 1 Ki. 20:23; 11 Ki. 5:17; cf. Moore: Judges. p. 294.

<sup>5</sup>cf. Kautzsch in H. B. D. extra vol. p. 612.

The great documents above mentioned indicate the attitude toward JHVH not only among the people at large, but among prophetic circles in particular. It was in this environment that the conception of JHVH's supremacy took deepest root and called out the most enduring expression. Elijah and Elisha are often looked upon as though they were separated by a wide gulf from the religious thought and life of their day; whereas they stand on a very sound basis of popular religious feeling, as well as among a circle in which they might be eminent, but not different in kind. Instances of this higher type of prophetic thought and character may be seen in 'Nathan, in the days of David, and 'Micalah ben Imlah in the days of Ahab.

On the one hand then, Elijah and Elisha, drew their inspiration from a tradition and fellowship which represent an important element in the life of their time; and, on the other hand, while their work was distinguished by their own strong individualities, it was quite in keeping with the source from which it sprang.

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<sup>1</sup>I Sam. 12:1 ff.

<sup>1</sup>I Ki. 22:8 ff

b.

#### AHAB AND JEZEBEL.

In the days of Elijah the prophet, Ahab son of Omri, ascended the throne of Israel. Judged by the political standards of the time he did his duty by the nation, and showed himself a ruler by no means lacking in ability and courage. He was valiant in battle (1 K. 22:32-34); he beautified the capital, Samaria, by the erection of fine buildings (1 K. 16:32, 22:39); he also improved other cities, as well as the capital, (1 K. 22:39); he strengthened his position from time to time by diplomatic alliances. For the first time since the separation of the two kingdoms, peace was established; and Ahab and Jehoshaphat are on friendly terms (1 K. 22:2, 44). He was occasionally able to conclude favorable treaties with Syria (1 K. 20:34.) His best remembered alliance, however, was with Tyre and Sidon, in the marriage with Jezebel, daughter of Ethbaal, king of Sidon; but this is remembered for its religious, rather than for its political significance. Ahab himself seems to have been quite as sincere in his JHVH worship as probably, the majority of his subjects. His three children bear names compounded with the divine name.<sup>1</sup> Prophets of JHVH had their places at court.<sup>2</sup> His wife Jezebel adheres to the worship of her own native deity, the Tyrian Baal; and to her is ascribed the work of making the worship of Baal such an important movement, that it precipitates the crisis in which Elijah and Elisha are the most conspicuous actors. Just

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<sup>1</sup>Ahaziah, Joram, Athaliah.

<sup>2</sup>1 Ki. 22:6, 8.

what Jezebel's part was, is difficult to determine. According to the "prophetic" group of narratives (e. g. 1 K. 19:14) an effort was being made with fair success, to stamp out JHVH worship in Israel. On the other hand, the "royal" group of narratives indicate that there was no interference with the adherents of JHVH (e. g. 1 K. 20:13. 28, 22:6. 8). The truth probably lies between these extremes; for, that Jezebel carried on some propaganda in favor of Baal worship, can hardly be doubted. Her antagonism against it may well have been due to mixed motives. Elijah's zeal for JHVH would inevitably involve opposition to foreign support of alien deities. Jezebel's imperious temper is finely suggested in the LXX reading of 1 K. 19:2 *et ob ei Ηλειου και εγω κεραια* and her unscrupulous insistence upon all royal prerogatives, real or supposed, (e. g. 1 Ki. 21:7), is convincingly indicated. In order to take the place she now holds in the narrative, she must have been an exceptional woman, of stronger will than her husband, Ahab, and the instigator of a movement of sufficient magnitude to awaken not only the suspicions but also the actual opposition of the better class of prophets. Wellhausen<sup>10</sup> so far minimizes this activity of Jezebel as to deny any trace of a religious disturbance which divided the people. He cites (1) the existence of JHVH prophets at Bethel, Jericho and Gilgal; (2) the Jehovah prophets in Ahab's court; (3) the names of Ahab's sons; (4) the Syrian wars, which he supposes would absorb the strength of the people. It seems to the present writer that these are by no means conclusive, and for the following reasons: (1) the fact that all the JHVH prophets were not annihilated, by no means indicates inactivity on the part of Jezebel. Her aim seems to have been to naturalize and nationalize the

<sup>10</sup>Prol. Eng. Trans. p 289.

worship of Baal in Israel, and to oppose the prophets only as they opposed this purpose. But even had she begun an aggressive persecution looking toward total suppression of the JHVH worship, the prophetic schools, which had been long established before Jezebel arrived, could not have been wiped out in a moment. The national loyalty to JHVH and his prophets would have made this difficult, even for a Jezebel; (2) the presence of such a prophet as Micaiah in the court, with the obvious friction which existed between him and Ahab, (1 K. 22<sup>9</sup>), indicates that there was some religious difficulty in the air. And this testimony is the more convincing because found in the "royal" group of narratives, which make no mention of Elijah, and which are favorable to the King; (3) the names of Ahab's sons proves nothing either way. He also erected a temple for Baal worship; (4) where all wars are religious wars," it is idle to say that war displaces religious interests. It is nearer the truth to say that the Syrian wars would have quickened the response of the people to just such an appeal as an Elijah could make.

In view of these considerations it seems quite justifiable to find in Jezebel, if not the sole cause, at least the chief cause, and certainly the most conspicuous figure, in the Baal movement. When Wellhausen goes on to say that, "It is a fact that the prophet's hatred of Baal succeeded at last in overturning the dynasty of Omri," it is difficult to understand his reluctance to connect Jezebel with the movement to any appreciable degree. On purely textual grounds this position is permissible; but the psychology of the situation makes it quite untenable.

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<sup>9</sup>e. g. 1 Ki. 20:13.23.28; 22:5; II Ki. 3:11; and the Moabite Stone.

## II.

### THE SCRIPTURAL MATERIAL

The Scriptural material is found in the two books of the Kings, 1 K. 16:29—II K. 10:36. This passage, which begins with the accession of Ahab to the throne of Israel ( i. e. of the Northern Kingdom) and closes with the death of Jehu, includes the narratives of Elijah and Elisha.

The literary character is uneven, but there may be found here passages second to none in the Hebrew Literature for loftiness of style, descriptive power, and dramatic intensity. Such passages are the famous accounts of Elijah 1 K. 17-19, 21; the story of Ahab's last battle 1 K. 22; the healing of Naaman II K. 5; the siege and deliverance of Samaria II K. 6:24-7; and the revolt and accession of Jehu II K. 9, 10.

Upon careful inspection of the whole passage, it becomes evident that, instead of forming a continuous and homogenous whole, it consists of a collection or compilation of such narratives as those above mentioned, along with passages of quite different style and extent. The composite character appears as follows: At 1 K. 16:29 where the passage begins, there is found a concise statement of the accession of Ahab to the throne of Israel; the date is synchronized with the year of the King then reigning in Judah; the length of Ahab's reign is given, and a criticism or estimate is offered of the religious character of Ahab and his conduct as King. The style is statistical, and the point of view dominated by concern for the sole worship of JHVH.

With cp. 17, appears abruptly the first of the splendid Elijah narratives. The style is at once graphic and flowing.

The center of interest is the prophet and his work. With the close of cp. 19, the story of Elijah is apparently closed, and cp. 20 begins with a new subject, quite as abruptly as cp. 17 began with Elijah. In cp. 20, the King, rather than the prophet is the chief figure. Prophets and "men of God" appear, but Elijah himself is absent. Ahab is presented in a light by no means an unfavorable one, in contrast to his characterization in cp 18, and the condemnation he here incurs is due to political rather than religious considerations. This cp. is not, however, a return to the style observed in cp. 16:29. Cp. 20 contains nothing of the statistical character, nor any thing to indicate the special view of JHVH worship which characterizes the earlier passage.

With cp. 21, Elijah again appears in the chief place and the whole character of the cp. indicates it to be a continuation of cp. 19 or at least to belong to the same original source. This view is confirmed by two further considerations: (1) cp. 22, in form, matter, and point of view, is seen at once to connect itself directly with cp. 20, of which it is obviously the continuation; (2) in LXX (Vat. and Luc.), cpp. 20, 21 of the Hebrew Text stand in inverted order. This not only maintains the integrity of the Elijah group, cpp. 17-19, 21, which then becomes cpp. 17-20, but also that of the Ahab group, cpp. 20, 22, which then becomes cpp. 21, 22.

With cp. 22:39 the style and interest recur, which characterize cp. 16:29, continuing to the end of the chapter and of the book.

Passing to II K., similar conditions are found. Such passages as 1:18, 3:1-3, 8:16-19, 23-29, 9:29 and 10:28-36, continue the work of the statistician. Such passages as 3:4-27, 6:24-7, 9—10:27, continue the narratives which,

while involving the prophets, yet find their center of gravity in their concern with the King and the Kingdom. And finally, the cpp. in i K. which are devoted to Elijah, find their continuation and counterpart in ii K. 1, 2, 4-6:23 and 8:1-15, which recount the exploits of Elisha.

In addition to the facts adduced above, the compiler himself indicates that his book represents his personal selection of material by his frequent references to records which can supply items he has chosen to omit, e. g. i K. 16:27, 22:39, 45, ii K. 1:18, 10:34.

Modern opinion is unanimous in justifying a partition of these cpp. according to probable sources, but no single scheme has been generally accepted in all its details. The separation indicated above is followed in its essential features by Driver, Kittel, Wellhausen, Keunen, and others, and represents the view most widely accepted. The best established feature of the scheme is that which deals with the statistical passages sometimes called the "Epitome." In regard to these the opinion is practically unanimous. They are looked upon as a kind of literary framework, constructed by the author from earlier sources, into which he has fitted the various selections made from other documents. This group of passages, however, has no practical bearing upon the present study, and may be dismissed without further elaboration.

Subtracting this element from the whole section, there remain, (1) the group in which Elijah and Elisha take the chief places, and which may be conveniently designated, prophetic, and (2) the group in which Ahab and Jehu stand first, and which may for convenience be called, royal. According to chapters and verses, the groups stand thus:—

Prophetic, i K. 17-19; 21; ii K. 1:1-17a; 2; 4-6:23; 8:1-15. Royal, i K. 20; 22:1-38; ii K. 3:4-27; 6:24-7:20; 9-10:27; (except 9:29).

The textual questions relating to the integrity and the literary relationships of these passages are interesting and important, but do not have, as such, any special bearing upon the present study. The point of importance here, is that of historical reliability. Are these passages trustworthy? If so, to what degree? To what extent can their trustworthiness be established? While it is inevitable that, as with other ancient historical documents, these questions can never be answered in a way that shall be absolutely final and positive, yet, strangely enough, there exists for the particular period under review, an original, direct, and unimpeachable witness in their favor, in the so-called Moabite Stone. This stone is now in the Louvre in Paris. It was found in Dibon by Rev. F. Klein, in 1868, and although afterwards broken, so as to seem almost beyond the possibility of restoration, it was eventually put together again, and its inscription deciphered. It dates from the middle of the ninth century, and was erected by Mesha, King of Moab, who reigned as a contemporary of Omri and Ahab. The inscription recounts the hostile relation existing between Moab and Israel, and in its confirmation of the parallel accounts in the Biblical records, supplies a valuable presumption in favor of the general trustworthiness of these records. Another direct testimony is found in the fragment of a bronze bowl, which bears an inscription containing the words, "Governor of Qarthadasht, Servant of Hiram, King of the Zidonians. Then he gave to Baal Lebanon, his Lord, as the choicest of the bronze. . . ." This fragment, now in the possession of the Bibliotheque Nationale of Paris, is recognized as being at least as ancient as the Moabite Stone. Many consider it still earlier.<sup>12</sup> The

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<sup>12</sup>For good accounts of both the Baal Lebanon Inscript. and the Moabite Stone, see Ball: *Light from the East* pp 238 ff.

reference is doubtless to a Lebanon shrine of the Tyrian Baal whose worship Jezebel endeavored to introduce in Israel. By means of these two inscriptions, the historical basis of at least some of the elements in the Biblical narrative, is at once assured.

The writings themselves supply sufficient data for reaching a very fair degree of certainty in an estimate of their probable date. First of all, in spite of the oriental coloring throughout, the direct and vivid treatment of the characters and incidents, makes it impossible to remove the origin of the narratives too far from the time of the events referred to. The recollection of the chief characters is too positive and realistic. Even more convincing is the tone of these narratives as compared with that of the written prophets whose work dates from 750 B. C. onward. In these earlier narratives the existence of numerous JHVH shrines is accepted without question or rebuke.<sup>13</sup> All opposition to the calf-worship instituted by Jeroboam is lacking.<sup>14</sup> On the other hand, it can hardly be claimed that the narratives as they stand, come from the hands of eye witnesses, although the impression of the events is still strong. For these reasons the narrative may be referred to the half century following the circumstances they narrate, say about the year 800 B. C.

It is further to be borne in mind that these narratives are not isolated and unique fragments of the literary remains of the Hebrew people. It appears to the writer that sufficient importance has not been attached to the fact that these stories synchronize closely with the great J and E documents of the Hexateuch. These, like the Elijah and

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<sup>13</sup>1 Ki. 17:30; 19:14.

<sup>14</sup>Kuenen: *Onderzoek*, Germ. trans, pp 77f; Wellh: *Prol.* (4) p 297; Cornill: *Introd.* (5) Eng. trans. p 214.

Elisha narratives, indicate a prophetic origin;<sup>15</sup> and while it might be possible on the basis of these few chapters from **Kings** to construct an unfavorable picture of the prophets as a class, one is met on the other hand by the great preponderance of opinion that it is just to this period, i. e., when the Elijah and Elisha narratives were taking shape, that the formation of the literary foundations of the O. T. must be assigned.<sup>16</sup> Their assignment, not only to this period, but also to prophetic origins, throws an important light upon the character of the prophetic classes at the time. While these doubtless included many who were slightly, if at all, removed from illiterate religious ecstatic devotees, they must have included as well, a more serious element, deeply concerned in the course of the national life, whose literary activity kept pace with that of the official recorders and royal annalists. It is an interesting coincidence that the E. document, which is assigned to the Northern Kingdom,<sup>17</sup> should be characterized by the prominence given to the function of the prophet, and also to the use of "Horeb" instead of "Sinai" for the name of the "Mount of God."<sup>18</sup>

It may be concluded then, on the basis of the reasons here reviewed, that the Elijah and Elisha narratives were reduced to approximately their present form, within the second, or at most third, generation following the events themselves, and that their historical character is both indicated and confirmed by the testimony of records from without, as well as from within, the nation.

<sup>15</sup>Carpenter and Harford-Battersby: *The Hexateuch*, vol 1 pp 108-119.

<sup>16</sup>Driver: *Introd.* (6) p 118.

<sup>17</sup>Dillmann. Kittel, Riehm, Wellhausen, Kuenen. cf Driver: *Introd.* p 122.

<sup>18</sup>1 Ki. 19:8.

This does not mean that the historical elements in the narratives can be thought of as strands of a rope, to be separated by a process of untwisting. They are rather roots from which these stories have sprung, and are to be recognized in the persons, places and principles, which became so conspicuous that their recollection was adorned with various details of the striking and marvelous.

The most conspicuous recent attempt to discover the historical elements in the Elijah narratives is that of Gunkel.<sup>19</sup> No one has seen more clearly, nor appreciated more fully, the legendary character, and the legendary constituents, of many Biblical passages. In his treatment of Elijah, he exhibits both the strength and the weakness of his method. His retelling of the story and his indication of its formal factors, are both carried out with a master hand. But when, taking up the points in detail, he attempts to estimate their historical value, or to show their identity with legends current elsewhere, his interest in these latter phenomena leads him into contradictions. For instance, he discards entirely the scene on Carmel as an event, "Demnach haben wir die Karmelgeschichte zu verstehen nicht als eine wirkliche Begebenheit aus dem Leben des Elias, aber als den Traum seines glühenden Herzens oder als den seiner Anhänger."<sup>20</sup> Yet the latter scene on Horeb, which he accepts, is left quite unoccasioned, in the absence of any other indication of Elijah's zeal for JHVH. It is nowhere indicated that the decision at Carmel immediately swept like a wave over the whole nation, nor that all Baal's altars were immediately demolished. Gunkel would make so much of the Biblical statement of the event at Carmel, that an irreconcilable contradiction shall appear between the two accounts of

<sup>19</sup>Elias, Jahve und Baal. 1906.

<sup>20</sup>op. cit. p 39.

Carmel and Horeb. Such a deduction is neither necessitated nor justified by the Scriptural material.

Another instance of inconsistency is seen in a comparison between his description of JHVH on p 24. "Das Charakteristische dieser Theophanie (on Horeb) aber ist, dass die Gottheit hier nicht in den entsetzlichen Naturerscheinungen selber wohnt, sondern in dem leisen Säuseln, das darauf folgt;" and that on p 59: "Der Jahve des Elias ist der Gott der Wüstenzeit, der alten, rauhen Zeit, der furchtbare Gott, der sich in den schrecklichsten Naturerscheinungen offenbart." Further allusions to Gunkel's work will be made in the section here following.

### III.

#### ELIJAH

- a. Survey of the Scripture material: i K. 17-19, 21; ii K. 1, 2.

**Chapter 17.**—The cp. opens with the announcement of a famine. Famines are frequent in the East today, and they were then. In common with other phenomena of nature they were given a religious interpretation, and usually looked upon as a divine discipline.<sup>21</sup> As such they were looked upon as being within the jurisdiction, or at least the prevision, of the prophets.<sup>22</sup> The famine referred to in this chapter may have been the one mentioned by Josephus,<sup>23</sup> who quotes Menander of Ephesus as his authority. The data are not sufficient to decide this. The important historical basis of the cp. is to be found in the conception of the character of Elijah. He is a prophet with divine power and authority. The impression he makes everywhere is that God is with him, and he is the servant of JHVH.

His stay by the brook indicates his out door life. The "sons of the prophets" from whose circle these narratives arose, knew Elijah as one who would have nothing to do with city life. Throughout the whole picture of Elijah, there is conspicuous the free wild atmosphere seen in many of the ancient, "men of God."<sup>24</sup> The brook Cherith must have been known as one of his retreats. Connecting naturally with this recollection of one of his places of shelter, is

<sup>21</sup>cf. Am. 4:6.

<sup>22</sup>cf. Amos and John the Baptist.

the idea that he is miraculously supplied with food. This divine provision for the prophet's sustenance must be regarded as having its chief value in its indication that Elijah was looked upon as being under the special care which JHVH bestows upon his servants. Such conceptions belong not alone to the remoter periods of Biblical story. The early Christian Church believed that Christ could change stones into bread, were he so inclined.<sup>25</sup> In the case of Elijah, the incongruity of the story appears, to a Western mind in the circumstance that the divine provision was limited by the water supply, and was unable to sustain Elijah after the brook dried up. Gunkel,<sup>26</sup> characteristically, finds in this incident a literary device for deepening the impression of the famine's severity: "Wie muss es jetzt—so sollen wir denken—im übrigen Lande aussehen, wenn selbst in den tiefen Flussläufen kein Wasser mehr rinnt." Yet, referring to the meeting of Elijah and Obadiah,<sup>27</sup> Gunkel makes the narrator use the severity of the famine to account for the separation between Ahab and Obadiah.<sup>28</sup> Such manipulation of motives reflects Gunkel's ingenuity rather than the art of the prophetic narrator. The scene by the brook is based in the greatness of Elijah's personality, and simply reflects the confidence that he was constantly under divine protection. It is no more conceived with the intention of emphasizing the famine than it is intended to extol the intelligent obedience of the ravens.

The journey to Sidon and the sojourn there supply, in harmony with the preceding, further aspects of the impression made by Elijah upon his generation. The journey itself reflects one of Elijah's characteristic traits. He was

<sup>25</sup>Mt. 4:3f.

<sup>26</sup>op. cit. p 10.

<sup>27</sup>1 Kl. 18:7.

<sup>28</sup>op cit. p 14.

one who not only avoided the artificial life of city and court, but was one whose journeys were as frequent as they were unexpected. He could not and would not stay long in one place. The abruptness of his appearances and disappearances, as expressed in the narratives, has long been noticed, but without any very satisfactory explanation. They are ascribed either to textual accidents, or to legendary portrayal. Psychologically they are quite intelligible. Numerous indications show Elijah to have been one of those intense, nervous and erratic characters, that must be constantly active, that are never content to remain anywhere. The tradition has finely caught and faithfully preserved this temper of the man, and the abrupt way in which he appears and disappears simply reproduces the contemporary impression.

The two wonders of prolonging the supply of meal and oil, and the restoration to life of the widow's son, must be referred to the popular estimate of Elijah as one endowed with miraculous powers. On the one hand, they cannot be considered characteristic of Elijah in any special sense, for they are closely paralleled, not only in the case of Elisha, but in such later incidents as the feeding of the five thousand,<sup>23</sup> the restoring of the widow of Nain's son,<sup>24</sup> the recalling to life of Dorcas by Peter,<sup>25</sup> and other similar incidents. On the other hand, they are undoubted evidences that Elijah was known as a mighty prophet in his own day, and as one who performed the various wonders expected and believed of prophets, among a people who found no logical nor scientific difficulties in the way of such beliefs.

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<sup>23</sup>Lu. 9:10-17.

<sup>24</sup>Lu. 7:11-17.

<sup>25</sup>Ac. 9:36 ff.

**Chapter 18.**—Elijah's connection with the famine is here continued and completed; his agency in the matter being maintained to the last. For although in v. 1. JHVH says he will send rain, vv 42 ff indicate that in spite of this, the rain would not have come had not Elijah prayed for it.<sup>32</sup> Historically considered this coming of the rain in response to Elijah's prayer must be valued and understood in the way indicated in the survey of cp. 17.

Enclosed within the references to the rain, with which the cp. begins and ends, is the famous scene on Carmel. Can it be considered in any sense historical? This question has received the most diverse answers; from the acceptance of every detail of the narrative as an actual fact, to Gunkel's dismissal of the whole as "ein glühender Traum." The truth here, as in so many cases lies between these extremes. Ahab and Elijah are both historical figures. That they came into religious conflict is also beyond question. It is historically certain that one of the most conspicuous aspects of the religious life of Israel is the continuing defection of a considerable portion of the people from the worship of JHVH to that of Baal. Although Ahab's attitude toward the JHVH worship may not have been that of enmity, his undoubted support of Baal worship is that by which he was most vividly remembered in after years,<sup>33</sup> and this attitude toward Baal harmonized well with the disfavor in which he held Micaiah,<sup>34</sup> a true prophet of JHVH. There is no in-

<sup>32</sup>This notion finds an interesting expansion in the reference to Elijah in Jas. 5:17f, where it is said not only that Elijah prayed for rain at the end of the famine, but also that the famine came in response to a similar prayer of power at the outset.

<sup>33</sup>1 Ki. 16:30-33; 21:25f.

<sup>34</sup>1 Ki. 22:7-9.

dication that up to this time the issue had been raised between JHVH and Baal. The conflict, so abundantly witnessed in later records, must have had a beginning. This is the only period between the time of Jeroboam I and the time of the prophet Hosea, where there are any indications of the emergence of such an issue. The simple fact that the issue was defined during Ahab's reign, would, in view of his support of the Baal worship, be quite sufficient reason to connect him positively with an anti-JHVH party. The location of the incident on Carmel also adds probability to its historicity. That the topography of the place justifies the statements of the narrative has long been recognized. The mention of the altar itself is of equal importance. These shrines and sacred sites are almost invariably connected with some great name or incident. This shrine on Carmel was rehabilitated and rededicated by Elijah. The time elapsing between the incident itself and the written form of the tradition is too short to permit its invention as pure fiction. Something must have occurred to connect a well-known shrine with an equally well-known character. Objection has been made to the possibility of Elijah, or any other man, singlehanded, putting to death 450 men in an hour or two. Gunkel calls this "ein wenig zu heldenhaft."<sup>23</sup> This is inadequate as a basis for denying the whole incident. The putting to death of profaners of a shrine is a matter of common knowledge, and of common consent in the East, even to the present time. Such a performance, it is true, could hardly be accredited to an individual; but it agrees exactly with the other characteristics of Elijah, to find him one who could well excite, and then lead, just such an onslaught as this. The falling of fire from heaven (viz: lightning) at the psychological moment, is of course, neither impossible nor incredible, but the narrative understands it to

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<sup>23</sup>op. cit. p 36.

be a direct response to Elijah's prayer, and, as such, it must be viewed in the light of the wonders already referred to. To uncritical minds, quite ignorant of the discoveries of modern science, these things are quite within the abilities of "men of God." Even in N. T. times, the idea appears, when we are told that James and John said, "Lord, wilt thou that we bid fire to come down from heaven and consume them?"<sup>28</sup> V. 41, with its obscure direction to Ahab "go up, eat and drink," appears to reflect the fact that Ahab had planned a feast to be held on Carmel in company with the Baal prophets. Elijah seizes this opportunity to bring matters to a focus, and the incident follows which supplies the facts out of which the present narrative arose.

In view of what has been said, it is to be maintained that this cp. reflects an actual event, viz., a collision between adherents of Baal and adherents of JHVH headed by Elijah. It occurred on Mt. Carmel, at a JHVH shrine. It resulted in a rout of the Baalites. It was connected in time with a storm that closed the period of famine. It was an event of sufficient magnitude to raise a definite issue between the worship of JHVH or of Baal; and also positively to determine the direction to be taken by succeeding prophets of JHVH. All this does not make it necessary to suppose that a great tide of religious conflict swept over the land. Such an event as this might occur without involving a movement of national dimensions. The case does not demand a choice between the Syrian wars, or "a popular religious commotion which divided the people." (Wellh, quoted above.) Neither is the account too far from fact when it places the prophet, rather than the king, in the center of the picture.<sup>29</sup> Even in this very chapter Elijah's attitude toward

<sup>28</sup>Lu 9:54 (some ancient authorities add, "even as Elijah did")

<sup>29</sup>cf Wellh, Prol. p 290.

the king shows full recognition of Ahab's royal position. These narratives originated not only among prophets loyal to a great prophet but they were told by Orientals for Orientals, and they are to be understood in the light of all the modifications necessitated by the application of Western standards of accuracy. Here again, the case calls for an interpretation which recognizes the psychological factors.

Chapter 19 when correctly understood, confirms the view above indicated for cp. 18. Gunkel, disposing as he does of cp. 18, naturally must assign to a later hand the two verses introducing cp. 19.<sup>38</sup> But Jezebel's retaliation is the most natural consequence of the event which underlies cp. 18. Chapter 19, like the two preceding chapters, is an oriental, prophetic, portrayal of an oriental prophet. Underlying it, as its historical foundation, is the explanation current among the "sons of the prophets," for the fact that Elijah's work on Mt. Carmel led to no abiding results among the people. It follows immediately and properly, the preceding chapter, and its psychological accuracy confirms its historical value. After the intense excitement of Carmel, which, at the time, carried everything before it, comes the reaction of exhaustion and despondency. Jezebel's anger is aroused and Elijah is unable now to withstand it. For the moment his courage is gone. He flees southward to Beersheba "which belongeth to Judah."<sup>39</sup> As he took refuge by the brook Cherith in the time of the famine, so he takes refuge in the wilderness in the time of personal danger.

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<sup>38</sup>op. cit. pp 20 f.

<sup>39</sup>This phrase plainly indicates the northern origin of the narrative; and also has a bearing on the date. A Judean, familiar with his own territory, would have felt no need for such an addition. A writer living later than the fall of the Northern kingdom (722 B. C.) would need to express himself differently.

Here too in Judean territory, he is beyond Jezebel's jurisdiction. It is always in this free, wild life that he feels at home and safe. Leaving his servant here at Beersheba, he goes a day's journey into the wilderness. This rather superfluous detail of leaving his servant at Beersheba serves not only to emphasize Elijah's desire for solitude, but also to indicate that the experiences following were unwitnessed and unshared by any but Elijah himself. Indeed, the scenes which follow can hardly be thought of as reflecting any objective reality. They belong to the same class as Isaiah's vision,<sup>40</sup> the temptation of Jesus,<sup>41</sup> Paul's vision of the third heaven<sup>42</sup> and other similar experiences. These must be considered actual experiences, but subjective ones. Psychologically they are intelligible and credible; and when their Oriental origin is considered, their realistic style neither misleads nor offends. In the present instance, Elijah himself may well have told of just some such vision, supplying quite a sufficient foundation for the narrative as it now appears. "The sons of the prophets," the original transcribers of the account, have used it to supply a motive of Elijah's flight which might offset the one of simple fear, and give an aspect to his journey southwards more in keeping with their conception of their great leader. To them, he was too great for comparison with any but Moses; and the similarity between this scene on Horeb, and that ascribed to Moses in the same place, is obvious. This similarity is the more natural in view of the wide spread contemporary interest in the past history of the nation. The evidence and fruit of this interest are to be found in the great prophetic historical documents known as J. and E. This has been referred to above; but as far as the writer has been able to discover, the important

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<sup>40</sup>Isa. 6.

<sup>41</sup>Mt. 4:1-11.

<sup>42</sup>1 Cor 12:1-4.

illumination which it throws upon some of the facts of the Elijah narratives, has not been observed, or at least, not utilized. In the prophetic circles, from which all these documents emanate, it was inevitable that such comparisons should be made. Some of the details may here be noted. The Mosaic event occurred on Horeb; Elijah's vision is referred to the same locality. As a matter of fact the traditional mountain is about forty miles from Beersheba, rather than forty days' journey as indicated in the present account. Kittel<sup>42</sup> finds here an indication of the ignorance of a north Israelite regarding the geography of the southern territory. Gunkel,<sup>43</sup> while acknowledging the possibility of an exaggeration in the number, finds here an indication that Sinai (Horeb) lay far south of the present traditional site. Neither of these conjectures, which fairly represent current opinion, meet the case. The reference to the forty days belongs to that part of the account which is based upon the tradition concerning Moses, and is not to be considered a literal designation of distance. It belongs with the feature of being forty days without food.<sup>44</sup> As to the vision itself, it is not to be denied that its form may have been occasioned for Elijah himself, by his own consciousness of the Mosaic narrative, but its psychological appropriateness is equally indisputable. The wind, the earthquake, the fire, are all prepared for in the recollection of the recent occurrence on Carmel; and the sense of defeat supplies an ideal motive for the feeling that these violent manifestations did not represent God himself, that God was not in them, that at best they were only his servants (cf. Psa. 104<sup>45</sup>; 148<sup>46</sup>). The climax of the vision comes in Elijah's consciousness that he is in

<sup>42</sup>p. 152.

<sup>43</sup>op. cit. p. 23.

<sup>44</sup>cf. Ex. 34:28, and Mat. 4:2.

the presence of JHVH; that in spite of the miscarriage of his efforts, JHVH is still the God before whom he stands."<sup>4</sup> The divine directions which are represented as being given to Elijah at this time, for his future guidance, must be considered as a literary expansion supplied by a later reflection upon subsequent events. What actually occurred afterward is looked upon as having been verbally commanded by JHVH himself, in personal communication with his prophet. The historical bearings of these commands will be referred to below.

Chapter 21 narrates Elijah's rebuke of Ahab, for the murder of Naboth. Whether this account comes from the same<sup>5</sup> hand, or different hands,<sup>6</sup> as the preceding chapters does not weaken its historicity, which there is no good reason for doubting. As Samuel rebuked Saul, as Nathan rebuked David, as Amos rebuked Jereboam II, as Isaiah rebuked Ahaz, as John the Baptist rebuked Herod, so Elijah rebukes Ahab. This kind of thing is so characteristic of the prophets, and so abundantly confirmed in one case after another that the present instance may be accepted as a reliable contribution to the historical portrait of Elijah. The

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<sup>4</sup>This is not the place for the discussion of religious psychology, but reference may be made in connection with this vision of Elijah's to two passages in Prof. James' *Varieties of Religious Experience*. The quotation from Luther (p 137) is an interesting modern parallel to Elijah's discouragement; and the passage on p 66, from an unnamed correspondent, is equally interesting as a parallel to the theophany. Turning to the O. T. narratives from this modern work; it needs but little allowance for oriental rhetoric to establish the actuality of such experiences. Many an element which Gunkel dismisses as a "Märchenmotiv," would if more carefully considered, be found to rest upon an adequate psychological basis.

<sup>5</sup>Wellh, Driver, Kittel.

<sup>6</sup>Kunen.

occasion would be doubly repugnant to a prophet of JHVH, not only because of the murder itself, but also because of its violation of the right of inheritance.

The remaining references to Elijah (iiK. 1 and 2) are so freely expanded by the narrator that they yield but little of historical value. In the first cp. the description of Elijah's appearance (v. 8,) may be accepted without question, both on account of its intrinsic probability, and also because it agrees so perfectly with the other aspects of his character. The account of the ascent in a chariot of fire (cp. 2,) yields but one fact, viz; that his burial place is unknown. The "horses and chariots of fire" connect themselves rather with Elisha than Elijah, and will be referred to below.

On the basis of these historical materials, it becomes possible to form a fair estimate of Elijah's personality, aims and achievements.

b. Personality:

Elijah comes from the district of Gilead, east of the Jordan, and is called the "Tishbite" from the name of his native town.<sup>49</sup> He is an Israelite, a servant of JHVH ("JHVH\* \* \* before whom I stand" i K. 17,<sup>1</sup>) and identified in his own thought with the faithful servants of JHVH who had lived before him (iK 19<sup>40</sup>) His appearance is described with classical directness in ii K 1<sup>8</sup> "a man wearing a hairy mantel and a girdle of leather." This is his characteristic garb, and its primitive character agrees with the elemental force of Elijah's moods and methods. His place is not in king's palaces, as a wearer of soft raiment; he be-

<sup>49</sup> ~~תִּשְׁבִּי~~, as the word stands in the present text means, "of the dwellers in." The LXX reads here. <sup>ἐκ θεσβων</sup> as if the word stood for the name of Elijah's home. This implies the reading, ~~תִּשְׁבִּי~~. <sup>תִּשְׁבִּי</sup> is then the name of a town in Gilead. This reading is to be preferred.

longs out of doors. His resort is to the brook Cherith; he retreats to the wilderness, and returns by way of the wilderness. He has great physical vigor. In iK 18<sup>a</sup> it is said that, "the hand of JHVH was on Elijah; and he girded up his loins and ran before Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel"<sup>80</sup> The text sees in this performance an instance of divine invigoration, but back of the text lies the tradition that Elijah was a man physically strong, enduring and vigorous. His physical freedom of life permitted a fitfulness of movement which must have seemed most erratic. His appearances are as abrupt, as his absences are baffling.<sup>81</sup> They are ascribed, however, to the direct action of the spirit of JHVH. Obadiah (i K. 18:7-15) is sent by Elijah to announce his appearance to Ahab. Obadiah fears to go because by the time he returns, Elijah may have determined to go somewhere else; or, as he states it, "the Spirit of JHVH will carry thee whither I know not." In other words while Elijah is intense and irresistible in action, he is also fitful and moody; and when not engaged in some absorbing project, he cannot always be depended upon. This too is psychologically faithful to the temper of such a character as Elijah. He responds quickly to a fresh impulse. On the other hand, when he gives his word, (v. 15) it may be accepted without question. His movements are so uncertain and so extended that he may be expected to appear anywhere within a circuit including Sidon, Beersheba, Horeb, and Damascus.<sup>82</sup> The motives which according to the narratives, impel him to visit these places, betray the desire to account for his frequent and erratic journeys. The fact is, that his was a nature which need-

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<sup>80</sup>a distance of 12 or 15 miles. (Thompson: Land and Book, vol. 2 p. 232.)

<sup>81</sup>i K. 18:7-10; 21:17f; ii K. 1:3, 7 f.

<sup>82</sup>i K. 17: 8; 19:3, 8, 15.

ed constant movement and change; and this characteristic, the tradition has faithfully preserved. The manner in which these narratives have been incorporated in the present book of Kings, reflects well the precipitancy of the prophet. But the accounts themselves contain plain evidence that this impression is due not only to the literary treatment, but equally to the original facts. His most conspicuous and best remembered trait is his intense energy, his zeal. The scene on Carmel reflects a man whose consuming intensity carried everything before him. When praying for rain "he bowed himself down upon the earth, and put his face between his knees,"<sup>12</sup> in the utter abandon of his appeal. This trait is also correctly reflected in his own words on Mt. Horeb, "I have been very jealous for JHVH."<sup>13</sup> He surrenders himself utterly and without reservation to the matter in hand; and carries it through with a furious urgency that nothing can withstand. Enforced by his physical vigor, his zeal is an irresistible torrent. Looking back upon his career after the lapse of many centuries, the modern Bible student has found Elijah's chief significance in his championship of JHVH as sole God in Israel. But the impression made upon his contemporaries was due, neither to this propaganda as such, nor to any success which accompanied its propagation. It was due primarily to a personality so compelling that, in its presence, opposition was futile. It is a trait found in great leaders; an innate energy which commands, as naturally as lesser spirits obey. In the case of Elijah this element overpowered not only those about him, but the man himself. It was so isolated by the absence of ability to organize and to establish, so wild in its fury yet so weak in its ability to utilize results, that whatever suc-

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<sup>12</sup>1 Ki. 18: 42.

<sup>13</sup>1 Ki. 19: 14.

cess followed the movement against Baal, which Elijah so dramatically inaugurated, must be credited rather to his calmer and better poised disciple, Elisha. It is this trait in Elijah which shows its reverse side in the utter exhaustion, physical and spiritual, which follows the scene on Carmel. That a prophet so highly esteemed by his contemporaries, should be pictured by them in such a state of collapse and depression,<sup>21</sup> indicates, in the naive way in which the prophet is set in this unfavorable light, a psychological accuracy which confirms the historicity of the narrative. These exaltations and despondencies are characteristic of this temperament; and the account is so close to observable facts, that its trustworthiness is strongly sustained.

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<sup>21</sup>1 Ki. 19: 1-14

c. Aim and Method:

In spite of the modern association of Elijah with the special championship of JHVH and an aggressive opposition to Baal worship; and in spite of the propriety of finding in this phase of Elijah's activity its most significant aspect; it is still incorrect to say that Elijah had any single, definite aim which directed his public career. At least such an aim can only be stated in the broadest possible terms. He was a prophet of JHVH and a zealous one. As such he was prompt to act in JHVH's behalf, as he understood it, whenever occasion arose. There is no indication that he premeditated, or definitely planned, a campaign against Baal worship in any such thorough going fashion as to justify the idea of its being his life work. His designation of himself as a prophet,<sup>561</sup> and as one who "stands before JHVH,"<sup>571</sup> indicates his thought of himself as a servant and messenger of JHVH without the suggestion, nor the necessity, of identifying himself with any special direction this service might take. "The word of JHVH" comes to him,<sup>581</sup> and he obeys it implicitly and directly his own thought of his work is not that he is following a plan carefully prepared, nor that he is directed toward some special end, but simply that he is following out JHVH's commands.<sup>591</sup> With reference to any aim Elijah may be

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<sup>561</sup> Ki. 18: 22; 19: 10.

<sup>571</sup> Ki. 17: 1, 15.

<sup>581</sup> Ki. 17: 2, 8, 16, 24; 18: 1; 19: 9; 21: 17 et al.

<sup>591</sup> Ki. 18: 36.

said to have had, it is not possible to say more than that he had the general one of doing whatever "the word of J. JHVH" directed. The narratives give no indication that the scene on Carmel was the result of planning or forethought, nor the culmination of a settled policy. The same is true of his rebuke of Ahab in the matter of Naboth. This latter could not have been anticipated for obvious reasons. As a prophet of JHVH the God of the nation, Elijah is intensely concerned with the people's faithfulness to their God. But Elijah is not a "champion of JHVH" in the sense of finding his sole mission in a propaganda for the exclusive worship of JHVH. Important as this latter movement was, it cannot be asserted on the basis of the narratives now extant, that Elijah himself intentionally planned it, nor systematically carried it out. This latter work remained for his successor.

Much stress has been laid upon Elijah's significance as a preacher of righteousness and justice, especially as portrayed in his rebuke of Ahab for the murder of Naboth.<sup>ee</sup> But the denunciation of royal misdeeds, and the demand for justice, can by no means be looked upon as peculiar to, nor especially characteristic of Elijah. It is to the honor of the prophetic class that, at least from the days of Samuel, there did not lack prophets who rebuked kings as fearlessly as Elijah rebuked Ahab, and who were actuated by principles equally ethical. Elijah's characteristic significance is not to be found in this connection.

d. Results:

The primary result of Elijah's career was the indelible impression upon his contemporaries of a commanding and magnetic personality. This impression pervades all

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<sup>ee</sup>e. g. Gunkel, op. cit. page 48.

surviving references to this great prophet. His zeal for JHVH would have counted for little had it not been as well the zeal of a compelling personality, actuated by an exalted religious devotion. To his contemporaries, the interests which engaged his activity fell below the level of the interest excited by the man himself. This latter was enough to signalize any movement with which he might connect himself. The result was that the opposition to Baal worship which he initiated thus received an impetus which raised it into immediate prominence, a prominence out of all proportion to the strength or extent of popular conviction on the subject. During the life time of Elijah the popular response was feeble, and the extent of the movement but limited. He never brought it into any effective correlation with the national life. And had it not been immediately taken up by his more capable, though less sensational successor, Elisha, its development must have been indefinitely delayed.

The second, and accompanying result of Elijah's activity, was the introduction into prophecy of a practically new element. Faithfulness to JHVH had, of course, long existed in the nation. But it had become so seriously threatened, since the great revolt from Judah, that the time was ripe to raise the issue between the worship of JHVH and that of the Baalim. The energy with which Jezebel tried to establish the worship of the Tyrian Baal, furnished just such an occasion as Elijah was conspicuously qualified to meet. The resulting outbreak brought into such prominence the question of JHVH against the Baalim, that it was accepted by the later prophets not only as a legitimate, but as one of the most important, elements of their preaching. After this time the prophetic writings all reflect the issue thus raised by Elijah,

and to him must be ascribed the statement of the question in this form. It is true that with Elijah only the beginning of this movement appears; and that, by the later prophets the idea was enriched with more exalted spiritual and ethical content. But the proportions to which it developed in later history only emphasize the significance of Elijah's work in originating it.

The distinction however must be maintained between the advance step which Elijah made for the prophetic point of view, and the development of a movement which could be called national or even popular in its scope. This latter, Elijah did not accomplish.

e. Later tradition:

The subsequent allusions to Elijah in the Scriptures confirm the view above indicated. He is looked upon as the classical instance of zeal for JHVH, while the character of the work ascribed to him has little if any relation to his activity as this is presented in the books of Kings. In Mal.3:23, he is to appear as a forerunner of the day of JHVH; but his work here is a matter of a social reform, a work by no means characteristic of the historical Elijah, and one in which such prophets as Hosea, Amos, Isaiah and others, were far more conspicuous. It is rather his famous personal zeal for JHVH which designates him as the one who alone could successfully stir the people to repentance. In the New Testament writings where John the Baptist is compared with Elijah, the similarity is to be found rather in the statement in Mal., where Elijah prepares for the "day of JHVH," than with the narratives in Kings. The same reference and the same significance are to be found in the accounts of his appearance with Moses at the scene on the Mount of Transfiguration.

What Elijah bequeathed to posterity was primarily, indeed solely, the impression of a great personality, intense, masterful and heroic. Only secondarily, and with respect to but a single thesis, did he make a direct and original contribution to the religious history of the nation.

#### IV.

##### ELISHA.

###### a. Survey of the Scripture material.

Far more than in the case of the Elijah narratives, the passages which deal with Elisha are confused, fragmentary, and overloaded with details merely marvelous. But here, as there, a firm basis of historical fact may be found, upon which it is possible to reconstruct the general course of events with sufficient fulness to justify an estimate, both of the events themselves, and also of Elisha's relation to, and influence upon, them.

The first reference to Elisha is in iK. 19: 15-21, where it is told that in obedience to JHVH's command, Elijah anoints Elisha to be his successor. Two important facts are here indicated, which are confirmed by the subsequent narratives, and which may be accepted with confidence, viz: 1. Elisha is the associate and successor of Elijah. However they may differ in externals, they are united in their prophetic calling. This fact has been preserved not only because it is true as a matter of fact, but because it was so recognized by contemporaries. This accounts for its preservation in the tradition. Elijah himself was a character of such imposing proportions himself, and was held in such high esteem by his fellow prophets, that it cannot be supposed that another could be thought of as sharing his place and work, unless this were made necessary by actual fact. 2. Elisha shows, in mode of

life, the most striking contrast to Elijah. Elisha is at home in the proprieties of civilization. He knows the meaning of a homestead, and of family ties. He is neither a wanderer nor a man of the wilderness. Yet, with all their differences, he follows with equal sincerity the prophetic call.

These two aspects of Elisha's career find such abundant confirmation in the narratives in which he appears, that they must be accepted as the well established historical basis upon which the figure of Elisha stands. However extravagant some of the marvels may seem, which are attributed to him, however widely he may differ in manner and method from Elijah, these two elements persist throughout the records, and give indispensable aid toward an understanding of his life and work.

With the exception of the above passage, all the material referring to Elisha is found in the second book of Kings. The separation of this material into three groups has already been made<sup>a</sup> As the passages stand at present, it is evident that they are quite lacking in logical or historical order. E. g., according to 5:27, Gehazi is smitten with leprosy, in consequence of which he would no longer be allowed to associate with those who were sound. But in 8:4-6, Gehazi appears without a suggestion of such a disease, and in good standing at court. Again, according to 6: 23, "the bands of Syria came no more into the land of Israel;" while in the next verse it is stated that the Syrian king comes to besiege Samaria. Another instance is in 4: 38, where the famine is mentioned as already existing; while not until 8: 1, is the approach of the famine announced. These are the most striking indications of the disorder in which the present arrangement has fallen.

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<sup>a</sup>See above page 17.

This fact does not necessarily weaken the validity of the various accounts; it means only that each incident must be considered on its own merits.

The "prophetic" group of passages will first be considered. With it are included the two fragments, 13: 14-20a, and 13: 20b, 21. Several passages may be at once dismissed. They represent the wonder loving folk spirit which is glad to attach to an eminent character the account of deeds he might be supposed to perform. It should not be overlooked however that the very fact that so many such incidents are told of Elisha, is evidence of the impression he made upon his contemporaries. To the people he appeared more sympathetic and approachable than the forbidding Elijah. He entered more intimately into their life, and their imagination. The passages which exemplify this, but which offer nothing of historical moment are: 1. Healing the spring at Jericho, 2:19-22; 2. The mocking children, 2:23-25; 3. The poisonous pottage, 4:38-41; 4. Feeding 100 men, 4:42-44, 5. The axe head recovered, 6:1-7; 6. The healing power of Elisha's corpse, 13:20b-21.

Two passages are so similar to what is told of Elijah, that they may be considered imitations of those incidents. Their character was sufficiently indicated in the survey of the material which concerned Elijah.<sup>a</sup> The passages are: 1. The oil increased, 4: 1-7; and 2. The Shunemite woman and her son, 4: 8-37, with its appendix, 8: 1-6. Even if these accounts were original here, they have no historical element to offer. As in the case of Elijah, they simply reflect the popular estimate of Elisha as a prophet and man of God, endowed with all the powers popularly attributed to such persons.

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<sup>a</sup>pages 23 and 24.

Three of the remaining five sections of this group, although so overlaid with the marvelous as to be of very slight value for historical purposes, are important for their indication of the part Elisha takes in the affairs of the nation. They are: 1. The healing of Naaman, 5: 1-27; 2. Deliverance at Dothan, 6:8-23; 3 Elisha's last words, 13: 14-20a. Beneath all the accretions of miraculous elements, there is seen clear evidence that Elisha was a factor in the national life, to a degree never approached by Elijah.

There remains of this group, 2: 1-18, and 8: 7-15. Reference to the latter will be made in the note on Elisha's relations with Syria. The former is important not only as the introduction to the Elisha cycle of narratives, but also as supplying a key to the understanding of his career, and confirming in the strongest way what was said above, p 42.

The acceptance of Elisha, by the prophets, as the successor of Elijah, could not be more strikingly indicated than by this scene. Whatever the actual occurrence may have been, there is here portrayed in the most realistic way, the idea that Elisha is divinely appointed to carry on the work of Elijah. In an age when events were ascribed to the direct action of God, it is only natural that an event of such importance, should be conceived by the prophets who preserved these traditions, in this naive oriental fashion. Corresponding to the idea of his divine appointment, is the recognition Elisha receives at the hands of the "sons of the prophets." The frequent mention of these representatives of the prophetic class in connection with Elisha, is significant because of the additional emphasis thus given to a trait of character in which Elijah seems to have been wholly lacking. Throughout the narratives, Elisha is uniformly portrayed as one who has a power of authority and

direction which operates through organization. He lives in cities and in royal courts. He advises kings and influences national affairs; and the reference here made to his position among the "sons of the prophets" reflects one of his important characteristics.

The phrase "the chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof," here uttered as a tribute to Elijah, appears elsewhere only in connection with Elisha. In 6: 17, horses and chariots of fire defend him; and in 13: 14 the phrase is used of Elisha himself. It is, of course, not impossible that the phrase should have been used of both; but in view of the fact that such epithets would naturally become attached to the more striking character, and on the other hand, considering that Elisha was concerned in Israel's defence in a way never suggested of Elijah, the tribute belongs to Elisha rather than to his more conspicuous predecessor.

The passages belonging to the "royal" group are: 1. The revolt of Mesha, 3: 4-27; 2. The siege of Samaria, 6:24—7:20; 3. The revolt and accession of Jehu, 9: 1—10: 27. In the first passage four facts appear which are here important: a. The presence of Elisha with the army; b. The recognition of Elisha as Elijah's successor; c. The opposition indicated between Elisha and the king of Israel; d. The manner in which Elisha seeks inspiration. These are the more convincing because, as the narrative now stands, they are details subsidiary to the main purpose of the account. They show clearly that Elisha had not only a recognized, but an assured place among the king's adherents, and that he holds this in spite of his well known opposition to the reigning dynasty. As Micalah was present in the court of Ahab, so Elisha is here. In both cases they were recognized as independent and fearless, they both

were disliked by the respective kings, yet both were sufficiently secure to prevent the king from getting rid of them in any surreptitious way. Elisha, more than Micalah, was influential in these circles, whose existence is perhaps only obscurely suggested in the narratives. But the conditions of oriental courts in modern times, would sufficiently warrant the assumption that such conditions are ancient. Neither prophets nor kings, in matters involving popular co-operation, can act single handed; they must have followers and support. Such a statement as that of 3:11, that, "one of the king of Israel's servants said, Elisha is here," points clearly to a group loyal to Elisha.

The connection of Elisha with Elijah is important because most historical studies of these two prophets have exalted the latter and degraded the former. The records at hand, however, look upon them as joint agents in a single issue. The more indefinite the records of Elisha (and it is fully recognized here), the more significant is the fact that all of them persistently associate the two prophets in their influence upon their own period. Whatever criticism may be made against the wisdom or ethics of Elisha,<sup>a</sup> it is none the less due to him that the work of Elijah was brought to any immediate national result. This is further confirmed in the hostile feeling of Elisha and the king toward each other—not between Elisha and the people, but between him and the house of Ahab. The narratives preserve this relation with interesting consistency.

The reference to Elisha invoking divine aid by means of music serves to emphasize his contrast with Elijah. This is the chief value of this item in this connection.

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<sup>a</sup>cf Wellh: Proe. page 297.

In the account of the siege Samaria, the portrayal of Elisha strengthens the features already indicated. Here again Elisha is among those who attend the king; the opposition between the two is plainly apparent, and even more noticeable than before, is the suggestion that Elisha has his own circle of adherents. (v. 32.)

The account of Jehu's revolt compares favorably, in its vividness and power, with the Elijah narratives. It is conceded even by advanced critics, that this passage is either contemporary with the events it relates, or else separated by but a short interval." Although its literary unity may not be above suspicion," as a historical document it is worthy of the highest confidence, subject necessarily to the corrections which are inevitable in the case of oriental narratives. The following facts however appear with all clearness: a. The dynasty of Omri was overthrown by Jehu, one of the officers in the Israelitish army. After a disastrous battle with the Syrians, in which Joram the king of Israel was wounded," Jehu seized the opportunity to revolt. The army rallied to his support and, following the time honored custom of exterminating the royal household and all male survivors of the ruling family, he was able to establish himself firmly on the throne. b. The uprising had a religious as well as a political aspect. Here again it must be borne in mind that such conflicts as these almost invariably find a religious sanction. It is only on such grounds that an oriental leader could gain the support of a people to whom the claims of religion are paramount. To isolate Jehu's treachery, and make it the sole

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"Kuenen: Onderzoek, Germ. trans. page 82.

"9:29 is an obvious instance; and 9: 14b 15a is hardly less certain.

"8:29.

cause of the revolt," is to ignore the facts of oriental life. Zeal for JHVH from Jehu's point of view, and in the view of his contemporaries, would call for just such a performance as Jehu carried out. Indeed, the incidental allusion to Jehonadab the Rechabite (10: 15ff) indicates that the popular support of an outbreak against Baal was more far reaching than Wellhausen seems to think.<sup>11</sup> c. Elisha was the center and representative of these religious interests. Whatever ends of his own Jehu sought to serve, the narrative leaves no room for the assumption that his revolt would have succeeded without Elisha's support. His influence is felt throughout: directly in the anointing of Jehu; and indirectly, in the connection which the narrative maintains between the revolt and the anti-Baal movement which had occurred during the reign of Ahab. This is recognized by Wellhausen when he says, "It is a fact that the prophets' hatred of Baal succeeded at last in overthrowing the dynasty of Omri.

b. Personality:

From the survey of the scripture material it has already appeared that the personality of Elisha forms a striking contrast to that of Elijah. Outwardly there was nothing in his appearance to correspond to Elijah's rude manner of dress.<sup>12</sup> He is always dignified and selfcontained; he

<sup>11</sup>Wellh: Prol. Eng. tr pages 291 f.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid page 292.

<sup>13</sup>1Ki. 2:23 is referred by Stade (Z. A. T. W. 1894 p 307) to a form of tonsure; but this is excluded by the Israelitish custom, Lev. 19:27 and 21:5. If on the other hand, it had been a prophetic custom in the days of Elisha, the practice of such men as he would have so sanctified it, as to make its condemnation soon afterwards most improbable.

<sup>14</sup>1Ki. 6:32.

lacks the impetuosity and fierce enthusiasm of Elijah. He dwelt with the people, was widely known, easily found, and continually appealed to. He was at home in the royal court at Samaria, and seems to have lived there from time to time. While he lacked the intensities of Elijah, he was steadier and more reliable. He could hold steadily to a settled policy, and bide his time until events were ripe for the carrying out of his plans. To accomplish these he worked easily with others. He did not feel it necessary to act singlehanded; he was able to direct. These matters however, concern talent and temperament.

As far as his prophetic call was concerned, he was as devoted and as steadfast as Elijah. He was equally courageous in his opposition to the king and equally faithful in his obedience to the word of JHVH. In integrity of character, there is no choice between the two. With equal devotion to JHVH each followed the prophetic call according to the direction marked out for him by the circumstances of his time, and the gifts with which he was endowed.

c. Aim and method:

Unlike Elijah, Elisha had a definite aim. He had caught the spirit of the great issue between JHVH and Baal, and had accepted as his great commission the dethronement of the dynasty which had imperilled the nation's faithfulness to JHVH. It must be remembered that the high ethical conception of the later prophets had not yet been promulgated, and on the basis of these later developments, to belittle the significance of Elisha, is to violate historical values. Even the prophets of that day, saw no other way to abolish the Baal worship they denounced, than by exterminating the rulers who introduced and maintained it. This point of view belongs to Elijah as well as Elisha. To

accomplish such a result calls for foresight and direction. Elijah either did not see this, or was unable to undertake it. Yet his zeal and victories for JHVH would have amounted to little, unless the Baal adherents, who were at the same time the rulers of the land, were signally overcome. This was the work Elisha undertook and accomplished. His attitude toward the house of Ahab is consistently antagonistic, and is so recognized by the king.<sup>11</sup> The anointing of Jehu was only the culmination of an opposition long maintained. As such it throws a significant light upon Elisha's career. It is difficult to suppose, in view of what is told of Elisha in the course of the various narratives, that his selection of Jehu was a random choice. Elisha was familiar with the people of the court, he was equally at home with the army,<sup>12</sup> and the probabilities all point to his previous knowledge of Jehu as early as the days of Ahab.<sup>13</sup> Neither is his opposition to the house of Ahab a sudden impulse. It too, dates from the same early period. These two facts are linked together in Elisha's plans to accomplish what he conceives as Elijah's great work. The house of Ahab must be overthrown. Elisha, looking about for a capable instrument, finds him in Jehu. He then waits for a suitable opportunity. This occurs at the battle of Ramoth-Gilead, and there he calls Jehu to action. This view is supported by all the facts of the case; and modern students all agree that it was the prophetic activity which finally accomplished the downfall of the dynasty of Ahab. This means, however, that Elisha takes a much more important place in the history than is commonly accorded him, and that his relation to Elijah is by no means that of a mere subordinate. His aim was more definite, his method more

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<sup>11</sup>1 Ki. 3:11, 13; 6:32.

<sup>12</sup>1 Ki. 3.

<sup>13</sup>cf. 1 Ki. 9:36

consistent, and his success more complete. He has suffered in comparison with Elijah chiefly because he lacked an enthusiastic temperament and an adequate biographer. His performances were not sensational, and did not lend themselves to vivid literary portrayal. But he was a prophet of insight and of power, and well deserves to be coupled with Elijah in the intimate and equal way that appears in all the early records.

d. Results:

The end toward which Elisha had steadily advanced was the overthrow of the royal supporters of Baal. It is in view of this intention that his work must be estimated. Wellhausen<sup>14</sup> finds in Jehu's revolt nothing but the treasonable ambition of a murderous traitor. It is much nearer the truth, however, to suppose that Jehu took himself seriously in the role assigned him.<sup>15</sup> It is due to Elisha then that the movement inspired by Elijah came to any tangible result. His choice of a leader was vindicated by the thoroughgoing, if cold blooded fashion in which Jehu accomplished his task. Elisha then, must be recognized as the one who brought to successful issue the movement which Elijah initiated against the house of Ahab and the Tyrian Baal. That later tradition has practically ignored him, is due to the overwhelming impression made by the personality of Elijah, rather than because Elisha was in any way less successful, or less important in the course of the Hebrew history than his predecessor.

e. Relations with Syria:

In view of the frequent wars between Israel and Syria, it is at first confusing to find suggestions of such intimacy

<sup>14</sup>Prol. Eng. tr. pp 291 f. also Cornill, *Proph. of Isr.* p 33.

<sup>15</sup>cf. Smith: *O. T. Hist.* p. 200.

between the two kingdoms, and especially between Elisha and the Syrians as appear in these narratives. It is even told that Elisha visits Damascus as one well known there," and announced to Hazael his approaching accession to the Syrian throne." These conditions become intelligible when the following facts are considered. The Israelites and Syrians were not always at war; neither did the same side always win when they fought. At other times they united against a common foe.<sup>75</sup> Territorially they were contiguous, and Damascus and Samaria were not far distant from each other. According to the fortunes of battle, the Syrians had "streets" in Samaria, or the Israelites had "streets" in Damascus, presumably neutral ground reserved for purposes of trade.<sup>76</sup> It was quite natural then that in times of peace, or of confederation, intercourse should be unrestricted and frequent. In the days of Elisha, the average of victory fell to the Syrians, but they were not always victors, and years of peace frequently intervened, so that the presence of Israelites in Damascus, or of Syrians in Samaria would be quite a matter of course. The story of Naaman, questionable as it is in some respects, is trustworthy at least to the extent to which it reflects this freedom of intercourse between the two Kingdoms.

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<sup>75</sup>I Ki. 8:7.

<sup>76</sup>I Ki. 8:13.

<sup>77</sup>cf. I Ki. 15:19.

<sup>78</sup>I Ki. 20:34.

V.

**THE WORK OF ELIJAH AND ELISHA.**

**Section V. The Work of Elijah and Elisha.**

The work of these two prophets must be considered as one work, whose center of gravity is found in the definite issue raised between the worship of Baal and the worship of JHVH. Elijah's outburst against the priests of Baal had awakened him to the deeper significance of their presence in Israel, and led him to denounce the King who had encouraged them. Elisha grasps the situation and with equal courage and with greater patience, plans the overthrow of the dynasty. What they sought to accomplish was the abolition of Baal worship, and the establishment of the exclusive worship of JHVH.

What they actually accomplished was a political revolution actuated by religious motives. Although they were successful in their plan to overthrow the house of Ahab, it is clear that their efforts were not of a character that could have any lasting spiritual influence. Their conception of JHVH must be judged by the ends they sought in his honor. Gunkel<sup>80</sup> has laid much emphasis upon Elijah's activity as a champion of justice. But the movement as a whole, as directed by Elijah and Elisha, leaves no room for this as its characteristic motive.<sup>81</sup> The championship of JHVH which has been so frequently pointed out by modern

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<sup>80</sup>op. cit. pp 48f.

<sup>81</sup>cf. also above p 32.

students,<sup>52</sup> was but a re-affirmation of the traditional, though neglected, faith, and failed to leave any traces that can now be recognized. When the prophets of the following century raised their voices against the Baals, they had advanced to a far more spiritual conception of JHVH; and in consequence sought different ends, and used different means, from those which engaged Elijah and Elisha. Yet their testimony shows beyond question that no lasting religious impression had resulted from the work of these two prophets. The house of Jehu accomplished much in the way of political and material advancement of the Kingdom; but there is no trace of the great religious agitation which succeeded in placing this line upon the throne. By the later prophets Jehu is denounced for his bloody deeds,<sup>53</sup> and the people for their continued worship of the Baals.

Even more striking is the fact that the later references to either Elijah or Elisha lack any allusion to this championship of JHVH, as this is currently understood. The reference to Elijah and Elisha in Ecclesiasticus<sup>54</sup> contains no indication of this significance of their work. References in the N. T. have already been noted.<sup>55</sup> The conclusion cannot be avoided that, whatever religious significance the work of these two prophets possessed, it was so overshadowed by the political elements involved, that it left no surviving trace.

Their work stands as a bold and daring effort to re-establish the ancient faith; but their methods were political and their message, although re-affirming one of the strongest elements in the Mosaic tradition, offered nothing origin-

<sup>52</sup>e. g. Kittel, Gunkel, and many others.

<sup>53</sup>Hos. 1:4.

<sup>54</sup>48:1-16.

<sup>55</sup>See above p 40.

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al. Since the days of Moses, however, none had been actuated by a more exalted or far-reaching purpose, nor had any stood upon a higher level of consistency and accomplishment. Upon their awn age they left an ineffaceable impression, and they raised an issue which, taken up by later prophets from a different standpoint, was destined to become one of the most valuable contributions made by the Hebrew people to the religion of the world.



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